

Professor Sally Mapstone FRSE
Principal and Vice-Chancellor

23 June 2021

University address to the General Council by the Principal and Vice-Chancellor

Continuing social distancing restrictions have made it impractical, for a consecutive year, to host the summer meeting of the General Council in person in St Andrews, and I am therefore providing this written University update to General Council members.

As I write this message on 23 June, I share in the relief felt by people across Scotland following the First Minister's address to the Scottish Parliament yesterday, and the subsequent release of a new Strategic Framework for emerging from the pandemic which sets out the Scottish Government's ambition to remove all legal restrictions by 9 August. It is only upon receiving that news and recognising that the lifestyles we enjoyed almost eighteen months ago are within safe reach that one realises how much we have foregone, as well as how extraordinary the conditions of our lives have been.

It is on that basis that I want to commence my address to the General Council for the summer of 2021 by expressing my sincere appreciation to every member of our St Andrews family – staff and students, alumni and family members, and partners and supporters, wherever you may be. The report which follows reflects on the seven months since my winter address was delivered to the General Council at the end of November 2020, and the successes herein attest to the purpose and collegiality that form the basis of the St Andrews attitude, and which are the foundational qualities upon which we build our successes. Our resilience and prosperity in spite of the challenge of our time is a tribute to each of you.

The pandemic has inflected every area our activities and we have written frequently to staff, students, and alumni to provide information on that throughout the year. Whilst I will share Covid-related updates in this proem, the core of my update will as usual reflect upon University activities under the pillars of the University Strategy for 2018 to 2023 – World-leading St Andrews, Diverse St Andrews, Global St Andrews, and Entrepreneurial St Andrews – which have been a robust guide throughout this crisis and continue to shape our planning.

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In November, I shared with you that we started the new decade as UK University of the Year in the Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide and that we maintained our third place ranking in that table in the new academic year. We have also maintained our second place in the Guardian University League Tables for 2021, behind only the University of Oxford, and the latest QS World Rankings released earlier this month have seen the University rise five places to ninety-first in the world. These are outstanding successes for an institution of our size and subject distribution, and they are consolidated by yet another first-place ranking for student satisfaction in the National Student Survey 2020 – the fifth consecutive year that we have come first. The last NSS took place during the onset of the pandemic, despite which we were the only UK institution to register over 90% student satisfaction, which is a terrific endorsement of our digital provision.

These reputational successes are reflected in the exceptional demand for student places at St Andrews, and we are experiencing increased competition across all cohorts despite the pandemic. As of 31 May, undergraduate application figures are up by 7% on last year, with a 16% rise in Scottish applicants and a 39% rise in applications from the rest of the UK. Despite travel restrictions, our applications from prospective overseas undergraduates have increased by 14%, with a notable increase from the US, and with consistently high application quality. Application and offer levels at postgraduate taught and postgraduate research levels remain consistent with previous years and we are on track to meet our target entrant numbers.

I am pleased to acknowledge that we have reconstituted our decanal arrangements to bolster the seniority of these crucial roles. The Dean of Arts and Divinity and the Dean of Science have been raised to Assistant Vice-Principal level and now report directly to the Master and Deputy Principal, Professor Lorna Milne. Professor Paul Hibbert and Professor Ineke De Moortel were appointed to these roles respectively, and both are now in post. The role of Dean of Medicine remains separate from these arrangements. A fourth decanal role, the Assistant Vice-Principal and Dean of Learning and Teaching has been introduced and reports to the Vice-Principal for Education, Professor Clare Peddie; the present incumbent is Professor Frank Lorenz Müller.

Leaving the Principal's Office at the end of June is Professor Ruth Woodfield who will demit her position as Assistant Vice-Principal for Diversity to return to her academic work in the School of Management, and we have commenced recruitment for a replacement Vice-Principal. Ruth's deft and authoritative work in overseeing the Diverse St Andrews theme and implementing the People Strategy has created a foundation upon which our inclusivity work will build for years to come, and I thank her both personally and on behalf of everyone in our community who will feel the rewards of her brilliant service.

I turn now briefly to address the pandemic, throughout which we have prioritised the safety and wellbeing of our students, staff, and townsfolk, as well as clarity of decision making and the efficient transmission of information to students and staff. In semester 1 of the academic year 2020-21, as previously reported, we adopted a programme of what we called 'dual-mode delivery teaching', with around 40% of teaching delivered in-person by the end of semester

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whilst the remainder relied upon digital learning tools. We have all been encouraged by the outcome of a Teaching and Student Experience snapshot carried out by the Academic Monitoring Group which showed that levels of satisfaction with teaching in semester 1 increased, despite the online provision necessitated by the pandemic, whilst attainment also improved on average. That is a heartening endorsement of the lengths to which our academics have gone to support their students, and the determination of the students themselves.

Following instruction from the Scottish Government and the announcement of a new lockdown in January 2021, students were informed that they should not return to St Andrews unless they met a specific set of wellbeing or subject-related criteria. The bulk of teaching has been entirely online, with exceptions being students in the School of Medicine and those doing essential laboratory work, and the town has hosted no more than half of our around 10,000 person student population during the semester.

Those students who have been here in person have benefitted from the Can Do programme which supports the creation of in-person events within Government guidance, both through the provision of an events programme hosted between the Students' Association and the University, and through the provision of a segmented, heated, and ventilated marquee on Lower College Lawn. Can Do hosted over 400 events in semester 1 and 25 during the winter break for those who could not return home. It moved online during the latest full lockdown, but in person activities resumed following the easing of restrictions in April. The Can Do project will continue, but eased restrictions mean that activities can transition back into the Students' Association as of next semester and the marquee has been dismantled accordingly.

The Can Do project provided the focus of a visit to the University by two of our most well known alumni on 26 May, Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge. 2021 marks the twentieth anniversary of the Duke and Duchesses' matriculation at the University in 2001 and their subsequent meeting as first years in St Salvator's Hall, as well as the tenth anniversary of their wedding in 2011. During their visit, they spoke with students about how students have coped and supported each other during the past difficult year, hearing about our Can Do initiative and provisions for well-being, whilst also witnessing some Can Do activities taking place and participating in an interfaith discussion hosted by the Coexistence Initiative, in recognition of the Duke's appointment as Lord High Commissioner of the Church of Scotland. To close their visit, the Duke and Duchess planted the first tree of the St Andrews Forest in St Salvator's Quad.

World-leading St Andrews

Readers within reach of St Andrews will soon benefit from the newly redeveloped Wardlaw Museum, which will open to the public on 26 June following its completion last year. The Wardlaw is a drastically improved and expanded version of its previous iteration, MUSA, and boasts additional exhibition spaces, greater teaching capacities, and a climate control system that increases the value and quality of artworks we can exhibit – thus broadening the cultural artefacts which our town can host. The museum's four permanent galleries are complemented

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by two temporary exhibitions: '[The Death of Marat & the Birth of the Lobster](#)' by our alumnus and neo-pop artist, Philip Colbert; and '[Julia Margaret Cameron: Vision and Verse](#),' centring upon the University's newly acquired copy of the *Idylls of the King and Other Poems* by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, illustrated by Julia Margaret Cameron.

The world-quality outfitting of the Wardlaw recognises that an internationally leading institution requires resources of a global standard, and the Wardlaw sits alongside other recent and similarly stellar contributions to our estate including the Laidlaw Music Centre and Walter Bower House at the Eden Campus. We eagerly await the formal launch of the Laidlaw when restrictions ease sufficiently, and anticipate its full employment by students, staff, and community members in the academic year ahead. In the meantime, Walter Bower House has already proven the terrific value it adds to our estate through the provision of socially distanced workspaces throughout the latest lockdown which have been hugely popular with staff who could not work from home. This thoroughly modern office building is equipped with a gym and cafeteria, and really sets the standard toward which our other upcoming developments will aspire.

Central to these developments is our planning for a New College for St Andrews on the site previously occupied by Madras College on South Street, which we anticipate receiving into University ownership around September following the completion of Madras' move to its new site at the west of town. The New College will be the first of its kind in three centuries and will preserve the early-nineteenth century buildings already in place whilst drastically renovating much of the eight-acre site to create 10,000 square-metres of teaching and research space for three of our foremost schools: International Relations, Economics and Finance, and Management. The New College will be a major development in our town and for our institution, and I am pleased to acknowledge that early and substantial philanthropic support has enabled us to move forward with the first phase of this project – with a view to appointing a team of architects by next spring.

The University completed its submission to the Research Excellence Framework exercise for 2021 in March, which constitutes a huge piece of work and months of coordination with academics in every school. REF is the national expert review process which UK universities fulfil to determine the quality of the work their researchers produce, and its results are decisive in funding assessments and have significant reputational value. The results from the assessment phase of REF 2021 are expected in April 2022 and will be used to inform research funding for 2022/23 academic year onwards.

We remain assured, however, that the quality of the work taking place at St Andrews, enriched by our global connections, is demonstrably world-leading and that this will be recognised. As of the end of April 2021, research awards for the year thus far stand at £31 million, and award applications are up by 10% against the three year average. In this regard, it is welcome news that the post-Brexit agreement allows for continuing UK engagement in pivotal EU research funding programmes, including Horizon Europe, the European Research Council, and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions.

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The research produced by faculty at the University's School of Medicine, and the education they deliver to their students, are globally recognised as world-leading; however, the University of St Andrews has been prohibited from awarding medical degrees on account of a legal quirk introduced upon our separation from the University of Dundee in the mid-1960s – thus accounting for the unique three-year undergraduate medical training we offer and which is currently contingent upon completion at a partner institution. I am delighted to acknowledge that this has been rectified via the Scottish Government's University of St Andrews (Degrees in Medicine and Dentistry) Bill, which revokes the prohibition stopping the University from awarding primary medical qualifications and which won unanimous parliamentary approval on 10 March. During the final debate I was heartened by the cross chamber support shown for St Andrews and the Scottish Graduate Entry Medicine (ScotGEM) programme in particular. The first ScotGEM cohort will graduate from St Andrews in 2022, appropriately 50 years since our last cohort of medical students graduated.

Alumni looking for yet further proof of our world-leading students need look no further: in May, Jonathan Gibson, a PhD student in our School of History, became the youngest ever winner of BBC's Mastermind at the age of 24.

Diverse St Andrews

In an outstanding milestone on our path towards gender equality, the School of Biology successfully attained its Athena Swan Gold award at the start of May – the first at this highest level achieved by the University of St Andrews. Athena Swan is a globally acknowledged programme coordinated by Advance HE and designed to rectify gender imbalances at academic institutions. The attainment of an award at any level demands an extremely rigorous assessment of workplace cultures as well as evidence of demonstrably meaningful interventions to foster positive change. It is a marker of cross-community support for gender equality that all our Schools have now achieved Athena Swan status – 16 at Bronze level, two at Silver, and one at Gold.

That external accreditation recognises an enormous amount of institutional work in support of the Diverse St Andrews theme, led by our Assistant Vice-Principal for Diversity and our expanded Equality, Diversity, and Inclusivity (EDI) team. This work includes one of our flagship projects, the [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Progress Reports](#), published for the first time last year to provide public access to the datasets which indicate the capacity for everyone at St Andrews – staff and students – to excel on an equal footing despite their backgrounds or protected characteristics which they may possess. The 2020 reports are currently being prepared and will be released soon.

Other interventions we have made include the launch of [Report + Support](#) last semester, an online tool which provides a supplementary avenue for reporting areas of concern with regard to harassment, discrimination, and sexual violence for students, staff, and members of the public, in-line with the University's zero-tolerance approach. Reports can be made

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anonymously or with contact details via the webpage, and this page also signposts further sources of support. Furthermore, and at this University's initiative, six Scottish HEIs have agreed collectively to undertake a culture review of student understandings of gender-based violence and sexual consent and misconduct.

In line with our commitment to creating an ever more diverse and inclusive culture, our Race, Ethnicity, Religion, and Belief Group has determined that the University will work towards making a submission for the Race Equality Charter in the next two years. Setting the foundations for this, an Academic Forum entitled 'Striving for inclusivity: conversations, curriculum and practice' was held for staff on 18 February, and on 18 March I introduced a panel event hosted by our EDI team entitled 'How to have difficult conversations about race, in the context of decolonising the curriculum.' This latter event was hosted by our Project Manager in Equalities, Jasmin Hinds, who is also conducting an audit of curricula in every School and sharing best-practice on curriculum decolonisation – a project which is reaching its first anniversary and has already borne remarkable cross-faculty engagement.

The pandemic has attuned each of us to the ways in which our personal and professional lives are intertwined, and the value of the People Strategy has never been clearer. In support of its swift implementation, we have introduced both a new Smart Working Policy and an updated Flexible Working Policy, whilst our Workload Working Group has recently finalised a series of principles to guide work allocation.

Global St Andrews

Contemporary limitations upon global travel have been addressed by our innovative use of technology to stay connected, and our community-wide mastery of software – from Panopto to Microsoft Teams – has enabled us to consolidate our partnerships with international institutions despite our temporary physical separation.

One can see this in the range of new alliances we have created with institutions that share our sense of purpose and values, as manifested through the signing of memoranda of understandings with both the Indian Institute of Technology Madras in Chennai and the Beijing Normal University in China. With the approval of Senate, the University has applied to become a signatory of the Magna Charta Universitatum, a network of over 900 universities focused upon fostering academic freedom and cooperation, and the University has also successfully joined the University of the Arctic network – creating opportunities for collaboration on north-focused research.

Our existing relationships are receiving unparalleled attention, owed in no small way to the Global Office which we introduced two years ago and has since become indispensable in aggregating, overseeing, and developing our international activities. This includes developing our relationship with the University of Padua, with which we partnered to host a joint online staff week from 7 to 10 June focused on 'Celebrating University Anniversaries' ahead of Padua's 800th in 2022. And at the end of last year, I continued our exploratory discussions

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with Russian universities by delivering a keynote address at a conference on Gender Parity in Academic Leadership hosted by the National University of Science and Technology, MISiS, in Moscow. This event was part of an increase in Anglo-Russian HE activities buttressed on our side by the British Council, and it follows a delegatory visit by British Vice-Chancellors to Russia in 2019 in which I participated. A return visit of Russian Rectors is scheduled for mid-October this year.

These partnerships foster the transmission of research and the creation of academic and professional links, much of which can take place digitally; however, they also enable the diverse offering of study abroad opportunities for which we are renowned, but which cannot take place digitally. As a result of travel difficulties this year, only around 100 students studied abroad for the full year, and our study abroad numbers were dramatically reduced – with fewer than 20 students studying abroad in semester 2, and with only 30 inbound rather than our usual intake of around 200 people. The ability to resume study abroad opportunities is entirely contingent upon international success at controlling the virus and implementing travel safeguards, but we can reasonably expect these opportunities to resume gradually across the next academic year as vaccines become globally ubiquitous.

The reacceleration of study abroad programmes will also account for the transition away from Erasmus+ following the finalisation of Brexit deal at Christmas and the introduction of the UK Government's new domestic mobility scheme, Turing. Turing will, in due course, be backed by £100M in Government funding and aims to support 20,000 HE students on outbound placements, with a global scope and a welcome focus upon widening participation. Whilst the scheme establishes itself, our Erasmus+ agreement has been extended to allow participation into the 2022/23 academic year.

Student exchanges have also been the focus of increased activity with the German Academic Exchange Service, or DAAD, and I participated in an international panel discussion they hosted in late March on the 'New Normal after Brexit: New Perspectives for Anglo-German Academic Cooperation.' Our engagement with the DAAD draws nicely upon the University's ongoing partnership with the University of Bonn, an institution of powerful centrality to our activities in central Europe.

Entrepreneurial St Andrews

I announced in November that the University's Full Business Case for the [Eden Campus](#) at Guardbridge had been approved by the UK and Scottish Governments in September, thereby releasing £26.5 million of funding from the Tay Cities Deal to the University; since that time, our work to foster and promote entrepreneurial thinking and activities has accelerated.

St Andrews Applied Research Ltd, or StAAR, is a wholly owned subsidiary of the University and provides oversight of all our entrepreneurial, spin-out, and commercial activities. StAAR, boosted by the TCD infrastructure work at Guardbridge, has recently progressed the Entrepreneurial theme through the establishment of a three year business plan and a set of

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institutional indicators to assess our performance henceforth, and it now reports directly to the University Court via the Planning and Resources Committee.

The goal of StAAR is not only to encourage innovative thinking but to facilitate the commercialisation of ideas by providing the skills and support structures required to capitalise upon inventions that arise from research activities – and several developments have moved this goal along. The University has, this semester, formed an ‘Industry Club’ around the Eden Campus led by Professor John Irvine of our School of Chemistry and Ian Hill, the Strategic Lead for Innovation at the Eden Campus, with the intention of bringing together companies and academics with the potential for shared working. Furthermore, the establishment of a Centre for Entrepreneurship at the Eden Campus’ Walter Bower House is also taking shape and will be fully functional by the commencement of the new academic year, with a view to training and supporting academics and students to turn their start-ups into scalable and impactful businesses.

Our staff and students already boast considerable entrepreneurial acumen. In March 2021, Professor Rebecca Goss of our School of Chemistry received the national AccelerateHer Award in the ‘Disruptive Innovation’ category for her spinout company, X-Genix, which seeks to improve both the environmental and financial costs of the C-X bond formation process required to manufacture of pharmaceutical drugs. There were two further St Andrews successes in the prestigious Scottish Edge awards, which recognise entrepreneurial talent through investment grants: Dr Ross Gillanders, a Senior Research Fellow in the School of Physics and Astronomy, who received £15,000 for his Lightwater Sensors enterprise; and Suhit Amin, a second year BSc Economics and Management student, who won £60,000 for his social-media influencer management and marketing agency, Saulderson Media.

Social responsibility

The University’s Environmental Sustainability Board has accelerated our engagement with sustainability, the most significant manifestation of which is the approval by Court of a new Environmental Strategy which commits the University to becoming ‘Net-Zero by 2035,’ with net-zero referring both to carbon emissions as well as all forms of environmental degradation. We want our approach to sustainability to encompass the entire St Andrews community, and thus to acknowledge the local, national, and global stages upon which the University operates. The Environmental Strategy is the product of extensive inter- and extra-University consultation and it provides a sustainability vision around which we can collectively mobilise.

On a local level, its activities have been underpinned through the University’s establishment of the Local Net Zero Network which engages local partners with a view to realising carbon neutrality across the town – with local business, golf, and tourist organisations included, alongside Fife Council, Community and Local Councillors, and our political representatives.

At a national level, we seek to become an exemplar of sustainability best practice in the HE sector, and one way we are doing this is through close working and alignment with COP26,

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scheduled to take place in Glasgow this November. I partly lead this work via my leadership roles at Universities Scotland and Universities UK, and this is supported by the appointment of a COP26 Project Manager, Louise Soutar. We have launched a webpage at which interested parties can read more about [COP26 and the University of St Andrews](#).

Our Scottish leadership in sustainability has been further recognised through an award of £1.2M from Scottish Enterprise's Low Carbon Challenge Fund, in partnership with the University of Strathclyde, to support the development of Scotland's hydrogen energy industry through work underway at our Eden Campus. The University has also been named a 'Heart Hero' by the British Heart Foundation, on account of the 15 tonnes of clothing diverted from landfill to charity shops by our student body – raising over £80,000. And staff and students received three prizes at the Green Gown Awards for the UK and Ireland, run by the Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education.

Our international environmental leadership continues via the St Andrews Prize for the Environment, our flagship global initiative that rewards innovative approaches to environmental change. The St Andrews Prize is now in its twenty-third year and has distributed more than \$2 million in prize money to support pioneering climate solutions. The conclusion of ConocoPhillips' partnership in 2020 brought the Prize fully under University control, and it has been reoriented by me and with the oversight of Dr Hayaatun Sillem, Chair of the Board of Trustees and CEO of the Royal Academy of Engineering, better to suit the environmental needs of our time. Nominations for this year have now closed and the 2021 final is scheduled for October.

The St Andrews Forest is our latest global effort to counter climate change. Proposed by student members of our Environmental Sustainability Board, it aims to create carbon sequestration on a large scale through an afforestation programme that spans our global alumni network. The University will proactively seek areas of land that it can reforest whilst simultaneously encouraging our alumni to plant trees wherever they go. This new woodland will accumulate over time to reach a substantial size and will alleviate some of our unavoidable carbon emissions – such as those incurred by student travel. The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge launched the Forest by planting the first tree in St Salvator's Quad, and that was celebrated by similar plantings by alumni across the world.

Conclusion

Next week is the University of St Andrews' graduation week for the class of 2021, which will take place virtually once more. I will, as Vice-Chancellor, bestow degrees upon 1,843 graduates – 1,675 undergraduates, 41 taught postgraduate students, and 124 postgraduate research students – during degree conferral videos that will be complemented by a social media campaign to celebrate our students' successes. Whilst we could not host these ceremonies in person, I know that our students and their families and friends will be staging their own celebrations wherever they are in the world, and however that manifests – whether drinking champagne with loved ones, going for celebratory swims in distant oceans, or perhaps Zoom-

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calling their classmates to eat cake together whilst physically dispersed across separate continents.

The pandemic semesters have taught us much about who we are and how we operate, and they have proven that the sense of St Andrews spirit which we have talked about for generations is not a buzzword, but a genuine feeling of allegiance, loyalty, and commitment shared between our community members. It is this that has allowed our community to keep safe, to care for one another, and to continue our world-class teaching and research.

The Scottish Government's announcement of eased restrictions means that we are planning to host our Winter Graduations for 2021 in person, and it will be so sweet to celebrate that ritual together again. For the graduating classes of 2020 and 2021, we have promised an in-person ceremony next summer when we will host three weeks of graduation rituals, and we are hugely looking forward to welcoming those alumni back.

The summer that stretches before us is certain to be unlike any other, and I hope that it is one of peace and plenitude for you all. My ongoing appreciation goes to all of you who work so valuably to sustain our University, and my very best wishes, on behalf of all at St Andrews, for the health and wellbeing of you and your loved ones. I hope that we can gather together in St Andrews before long, and I immensely look forward to that occasion.

Yours sincerely,



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Principal and Vice-Chancellor